

**PRESS RELEASE ISSUED BY THE OFFICE OF THE CURRENT
OAU CHAIRMAN ON THE CONFLICT BETWEEN
ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA**

On 24 May 2000, President Abdelaziz BOUTEFLIKA, Current Chairman of the OAU visited the Horn of Africa, within the framework of the Organization of African Unity's efforts aimed at seeking a peaceful settlement of the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The direct involvement of the OAU Chairman testifies to the grave concern of the entire continent over the resurgence of hostilities between the two countries, especially the heavy loss of human life and the suffering inflicted on hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians.

Between 24 and 26 May, President Abdelaziz BOUTEFLIKA visited Addis Ababa and Asmara. This visit enabled him to meet with His Excellency Meles ZENAWI, Prime Minister of Ethiopia, and His Excellency Isaias AFWERKI, President of Eritrea.

These meetings with the two leaders of the parties to the conflict enabled the Current Chairman to ascertain that both Ethiopia and Eritrea pledge to:

1. Redeploy their respective forces to positions held before 6 May, 1998 with respect to Eritrea, and 8 February 1999 with regard to Ethiopia, in conformity with modalities to be determined after a border demarcation exercise, and without prejudice to the final status of the territories concerned.
2. Settle their border conflict in accordance with the Framework Agreement and modalities based on relevant colonial treaties and international law, and through border demarcation/delimitation, using the Cartographic Unit of the United Nations and, where necessary, through arbitration.
3. Continue negotiations under the auspices of the OAU, with a view to finalising the consolidated Technical Arrangements and thereby pave the way for the implementation of the peace plan contained in the Framework Agreement, Modalities and consolidated Technical Arrangements.

4. The Current Chairman invited both parties to resume the Proximity Talks in Algiers on Monday 29 May, 2000. Eritrea promptly acceded to this proposal.

The OAU Current Chairman expressed satisfaction at the agreement reached by both parties. The Current Chairman also welcomed Eritrea's decision to withdraw from ZALAMBESA as from midnight of 25 May, 2000, as well as President Isaias AFWERKI's assurance that Eritrean forces would withdraw from BADAME and BURRIE. This last point was formalized by a written undertaking, duly signed by President Isaias AFWERKI.

The OAU Current Chairman believes that these initiatives taken by Eritrea within the framework of the Modalities would pave the way for the rapid cessation of hostilities between the two parties.

He also believes that the resumption of the Proximity Talks in Algiers as accepted in principle by the two parties would effectively culminate in the cessation of hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea and would provide the opportunity to finalise the peace plan, thereby preparing the ground for a peaceful, just and definitive solution to the conflict between the two sister and neighbouring countries.

In another development, Mr. Ahmed OUYAHIA, Special Envoy of the OAU Current Chairman was immediately dispatched to Addis Ababa to inform Prime Minister Meles ZENAWI of the acceptance by the Eritrean side of the Ethiopian demand, namely:

- the sovereign decision of Eritrea to withdraw from BADAME and BURRIE without prejudice to the rights of either party arising from the settlement of the border dispute, in accordance with the Framework Agreement and the Modalities;
- Mr. OUYAHIA further informed Prime Minister Meles ZENAWI of Eritrea's acceptance to proceed to Algiers on 29 May, 2000 for the resumption of the Proximity Talks.

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